

# THE ROMPPANEN CASE

By Moshe Decter

*Finn who gave Army key documents now faces deportation*

ON MARCH 20, 1949, Klaus Samuli Gunnar Romppanen, a former Finnish Army captain, landed in the United States with valuable intelligence documents on Soviet activity in Finland. He has spent the last seven years seeking to persuade American officials not to return him forcibly to Finland. Even now, his fate is undecided, a final deportation order having been stayed only by last-minute intercession.

Romppanen, born in Karelia in 1912, fought against the USSR in 1940 and again in World War II, winning the Mannerheim Cross and several other decorations. In 1943, he became an arms technician with the rank of captain and served until 1948 as Chief Inspector in the Ordnance Section, Weapons Division, Finnish Defense Forces HQ.

Increasingly disturbed by Soviet infiltration, espionage and economic penetration, Romppanen began to

collect important documents relating to these Soviet activities, especially in Karelia. When he had taken all he could safely cache, he resigned from the service and applied to the U.S. Consul for an immigration visa to America. This was turned down. Romppanen initiated talks with U.S. military attachés in Helsinki. He came away from these talks with the distinct impression that they had promised him a career in the U.S. Army and ultimate U.S. citizenship. That they could not, and probably did not, make such promises is clear. Nevertheless, they were sufficiently impressed to prevail on U.S. Minister Avra Warren to issue a limited visa for business purposes. Romppanen may have mistaken their keen interest (complicated by language difficulties) for a promise.

Romppanen delivered 25 pounds of secret documents to the military attachés, which they promptly forwarded to Washington. On March 18, he departed for the United States, was met two days later by an Army colonel at Idlewild, and was

soon placed on a train for Washington, where he was again met by high officers and installed at the Shoreham Hotel. For ten days, he was intensively interrogated by more than 30 officials, chiefly from the Army, but also from the Central Intelligence Agency and the Atomic Energy Commission. At the end, he was profusely thanked, provided with expense money, and dismissed. The military had done with him.

Romppanen then requested and received a visa extension to December 20, 1949, but a second request for extension was denied. From that point on, his persistent efforts to remain in the U.S. were motivated by powerful fears: the fear of legal prosecution and punishment in Finland for stealing confidential documents and transmitting them to a foreign power; the fear that Finnish-American relations would be compromised; the fear of ruining the lives of several Finnish officers and civilians who were secretly implicated in his efforts.

Romppanen visited the retired ;

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Finnish diplomat Hjalmar J. Procope in New York. Procope, who had served as Finnish Foreign Minister and Minister to the U.S., as well as President of the League of Nations Assembly, advised Romppanen under no circumstances to return to Finland. For the last six years, Romppanen and his attorney have managed to prevent this, their own ingenuity and perseverance being abetted by the slow-moving processes of the Immigration Service. The bare outline of those years will serve to suggest their nightmarish quality.

*April 1951:* Romppanen was arrested for deportation under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

*November 1952:* An Immigration Service hearing resulted in an order for his "voluntary deportation" (which permits slightly more time than an ordinary deportation order).

*May 1953:* The Board of Immigration Appeals confirmed the order.

*November 1953:* Romppanen applied for an adjustment of immigrant status under the terms of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953.

*April 1954:* Representative Charles J. Kersten of Wisconsin introduced a bill of relief to permit him to remain here as a resident alien. Congress adjourned without acting on it, and Kersten was not re-elected.

*February 1955:* A hearing on the adjustment-of-status application.

*April 1, 1955:* Application denied.

*April 16, 1955:* At 1:30 A.M., Romppanen climbed atop the Queensboro Bridge, looked around, descended. At 7 A.M., he returned to the bridge with food, spirits and a sweater for warmth. Attracting no attention, he climbed down. Then, at 9 A.M., he climbed up again; at last, television cameras, radio broadcasters, crowds of people, police and newsmen gathered around. That week, Bill Leonard focused his TV "Eye on New York" on the incident. And Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr. introduced a bill of relief, which remains tabled.

*October 1955:* Romppanen testified at a new Immigration Service hear-

ing on his application for adjustment of status.

*November 1955:* Application denied.

*March 5, 1956:* The Service regional office in Burlington, Vermont upheld the denial.

In all these years of bureaucratic infighting, Romppanen for many reasons never had the opportunity to present his full case. He felt morally bound not to divulge the names of the Finnish colleagues who had abetted his "treason" and could confirm it. He felt morally and legally bound not to divulge the nature of the information he provided to the U.S. Army. The Army interrogators most directly concerned did not feel free to testify at an immigration hearing. The top G-2 brass seemed consistently unaware even of his existence.

As a result of all these factors, the various immigration boards had only Romppanen's word for the value of his service. (There is, however, persuasive reason to believe that the information was highly valuable and that certain key figures could attest to it under proper circumstances.) And so the various immigration officers consistently made the narrowest possible interpretation of the laws which provide refuge for those who, if deported, face "persecution for reasons of race, religion or political opinions."

On March 7, 1956, Romppanen was picked up for immediate deportation and placed for safekeeping at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital on Staten Island. Six days later, at the request of Senator James East-

land, Chairman of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, Commissioner of Immigration Joseph Swing agreed to stay the deportation while he reviews the case.

There the matter stands. There is hope today because of the extraordinary persistence of Romppanen himself, the ingenuity and skill of his counsel, B. Meredith Langstaff, and the energetic role of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. But must a man be subjected to the harrowing course Klaus Romppanen has traversed only to be restored to a small measure of the hope he arrived here with seven years ago?

The real question is this: Even if Romppanen's 25 pounds of documents were worthless, even if no moral commitment had accrued to him from our initial acceptance of his information, even if his deportation would not bring dreadful embarrassment to this country and discourage new defections from the Soviet orbit—are not seven years of servitude sufficient to warrant our compassionate gratitude?<sup>15</sup>

It is an irony of contemporary history that America now uses her traditional role of haven for refugees as a political weapon in the cold war against the USSR. Compassion for refugees has been transformed from an end in itself to a means of disadvantaging the enemy. Perhaps the attempt to be moral by calculation is our basic mistake. Our safest, wisest course might be to revert to our former, less ambiguous morality: "Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. . . ."